
FY 2019
SMALL NEPA PROJECT DESCRIPTION
Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests

Please **do not leave any field BLANK**, unless it does not apply.
Submit form (Word doc) electronically to jjchynoweth@fs.fed.us by **May 9, 2019**.

(NOTE: Italicized / red comments are for reference only. You may delete them when completing form.)

Project Name	Black Skull
District Name (or "Forestwide")	North Fork Ranger District
County where project located?	Clearwater
FS Personnel Name, Phone Number and Email <i>If a partnership, please add name, phone and email; however, an FS employee MUST BE the project proponent and point of contact.</i>	Theodore Peterson, Fuels AFMO 208-765-7469 Theodore.peterson@usda.gov Brandon Skinner, District FMO 208-476-8206 Brandon.skinner@usda.gov
Legal Location <i>Township(s), Range(s), and Section(s) of project.</i>	T42N R7E Sections (33-36) T42N R8E Sections (15-17,20-22,26-29,31-36) T42N R9E Sections (25-30, 31-36) T42N R10E Sections (20, 21, 29, 30, 31, 32) T41N R7E Sections (1-4, 9-12, 13-16, 21-24, 25-29, 32-36) T41N R8E Sections (1-34)J T41N R9E Sections (1-24, 26-30) T41N R10E Sections (6, 7, 18, 19) T40NR7E Sections (1-5) T40N R8E Sections (4-8)
District Ranger / Line Officer's Name <i>Person(s) responsible for signing the decision document</i>	Andrew Skowlund
Is the project associated with meeting a Forest target?	Yes
Which CE Category does this project fit? <i>Provide citation: 36 CFR 220.6(e)(x)</i> <i>See below regarding 220.6(d)(x) projects.</i>	36 CFR 220.6 (e)(6)

A Project Record or written Decision are not required for projects for 36 CFR 220.6 (d) categories except at the Decision Maker's discretion.

IF being submitted under 36 CFR 220.6 (d), does the Decision Maker want a written Decision?

Yes No

*If no, this form **does not** need to be filled out nor submitted to the Small NEPA planner.*

If yes, provide the category above, complete the remainder of this form and have Decision Maker submit it to the Small NEPA planner.

At what level does the Decision Maker want the project scoped?

Internal X External*

Internal scoping will be through the Small NEPA IDT, unless otherwise specified. Scoping would be documented in the Extraordinary Circumstances Checklist.

*External scoping will be with the public via a scoping letter, a legal notice, and the scoping letter posted on the NPCWNF website. The Project will only be scoped to the Tribe(s) et al (see * below), unless otherwise specified.*

**For external scoping, please to complete block below.*

Provide a list of the individuals, groups, agencies, etc. (other than those listed below*) with their mailing address and/or email address, of those who will be included for external Scoping.

- DO NOT provide only a name.
- DO NOT leave this box blank: If no additional individuals et al are to be scoped please enter N/A.

** The Nez Perce and Coeur d'Alene Tribes will be scoped. The following will also be included for all SN scoping: Friends of the Clearwater, Idaho Conservation League, Thomas E. Peterson and Bill Mulligan.*

What Level of Analysis (below) does the Decision Maker want for the Project?

 x **Low level:** If the project's level of public scrutiny is projected to be relatively low or unknown, the line officer chooses who we would contact for scoping (limited). In this case specialists would only do the checklist for each project. Documentation for low level analysis projects would be a completed checklist filled out by the specialists, including the name of the specialist who performed the analysis, the project name, and date it was completed. No other written documentation would be generated.

 Moderate level: If the project's level of public scrutiny is projected to be relatively moderate to high, then the line officer chooses who we would contact for scoping (a little broader). In this case, specialists would complete the checklist with the only write up being for items that are present and the rationale for the effects call. No write up would be given for items in the checklist that are not present. If the determination is no effect (which generally speaking, most CE's should have zero to very little adverse effects), then document why that determination was made in one paragraph or less. If the determination is an adverse effect, then why that determination was made would be written in less three paragraphs.

List the Management Area(s) in which your project is located.

B2, C4, C8S, E1, E3, and US

What are the desired conditions (*relevant to your project*) for the Management Area(s) listed above?

B2 Goals: Use prescribed fire to treat activity fuels or natural fuel loading if needed and to provide insect and disease control. Any actions proposed in this project are intended to maintain the area as potential wilderness. No ground disturbing activities are proposed.

C4 Goals: Manage big-game winter range to provide sufficient forage and cover for existing and projected big-game populations and achieve timber production outputs.

C8S Goals: Wildlife objectives are primarily oriented at elk habitat management..... Maintain or enhance moose habitat as indicated by project or area analysis.

E1 Goals: Provide optimum, sustained production of wood products. Timber production is to be cost effective and provide adequate protection of soil and water quality. Manage viable elk populations within areas of historic elk use based on physiological and ecological needs.

E3 Goals: Manage timber while providing maximum protection of soil and watershed values. Manage the big-game summer range for a minimum of 25 percent potential elk habitat.

US Goals: Manage for resources other than timber such as dispersed recreation, and big-game summer range as appropriate.

Desired conditions are described in Chapters 2 & 3 of the Nez Perce and Clearwater Forest Plans.

Is the project in an Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA)? ☒ Yes ☐ No

If yes, which one? Mallard-Larkins Roadless Area

** Fill in the 'Project in Roadless Area' table below, **AND** complete a Briefing Paper - note map requirements. Provide the completed Briefing Paper to the Environmental Coordinator and Brian Riggers prior to scoping.*

Is the project in a congressionally designated area, ex. Wilderness Area, Wild & Scenic River Corridor, Research Natural Area, Historic Trail, etc.? Yes* ☒ No

If yes, which one(s)?

** Please contact Carol Hennessey, cahennessey@fs.fed.us, 935-4270, **BEFORE** submitting this proposal, to discuss how the project may affect the designated area.*

** For projects that occur in the **Lolo Trail National Historic Landmark**, please contact Steve Lucas, slucas@fs.fed.us, 208-983-4040, **BEFORE** submitting this proposal, to discuss how the project may affect the designated area.*

Are there Floodplains or Wetlands in the project area? Yes ☒ No

Are there Municipal Watersheds in the project area? Yes ☒ No

If yes, which one?

Is the project located in an RHCA? ☒ Yes No

What is the Purpose and Need for the proposed action*?

Vegetative Successional Stages

Purpose: Restore vegetative successional stages across the analysis area to a more natural condition, recognizing historical patch sizes and locations.

Need: The current distribution of vegetative successional stages can mostly be attributed to two events: (1) a series of catastrophic fires in this area during the period 1910-1934, which established a near-uniform starting point for natural plant succession across broad landscapes; and (2) wildfire prevention and control during the past six decades, which nearly eliminated the role of fire to fragment these uniform stands of vegetation. The interaction of these events has resulted in a reduction of the late seral stages, an unnatural abundance of the mid seral stages, and a lack of early seral vegetation relative to normal conditions (i.e., distributions which would have appeared naturally at these elevations in a wildfire-dominated landscape).

The Forest Plan goal to “provide habitat for viable populations of all indigenous wildlife species” (Clearwater Forest Plan, page II-2) emphasizes the need for habitat diversity. Since wildlife is a product of the interaction between topography, climate and vegetation, the unnatural distribution of successional stages across broad areas of the landscape has had important implications for many wildlife species that rely on one or more of the successional stages for their habitat. For example, elk, moose, white-tailed deer, snowshoe hares, and rodents rely on early seral grasses, forbs, and shrubs - vegetation that has become increasingly scarce. Some of these species, such as moose and elk, also find cover in old forest habitats, which are marginally distributed and key to such species as pileated and black-backed woodpeckers, pine marten, fisher, and flammulated owls. Finally, the abundance of prey species, found mostly in the early successional stage, has an effect on the predators (lynx, gray wolf, and wolverine) that feed on such species.

In addition, a balanced distribution of successional stages is more resilient to disturbances than the present distribution. The lack of early seral stages and bulge of mid seral stages is creating the potential for large scale, catastrophic wildfires more intense than typical wildfires. These events would have major detrimental impacts to soils and aquatic systems, which would be contrary to the Forest Plan goal to “insure that soil productivity is maintained and no irreversible damage occurs to soil and water resources...” (Clearwater Forest Plan, page II-3).

There are numerous other resource goals and objectives in the Forest Plan (refer to pages II-1 through II-8) that support restoring a natural distribution of successional stages, which is essential in meeting these same goals and objectives.

Natural Processes

Purpose: Actively restore fire to maintain healthy ecosystems and reduce the risk of widespread catastrophic wildfire.

Need: Historically, fire was the major agent of change within the Upper and Middle North Fork

Describe the Existing Condition of the project area.

A large portion of this area, especially that north of Skull Creek, burned in 1910 and regenerated to grand fir and Douglas-fir with little legacy white pine remaining. The incidence of mountain pine beetle may increase in the lodgepole pine cover type which regenerated after the 1910 burn. These stands are entering the age class where they are at high risk for beetle attacks. Tree mortality will increase due to the above agents, which will cause the death of individual trees. The length of the fire return interval may decrease from historical levels since Douglas-fir and grand fir mortality will increase from the above agents, resulting in increased fuel levels. Populations and habitat for species-at-risk such as the black-backed woodpecker, flammulated owl, lynx, grizzly bear, wolf, wolverine, and a number of plant species will continue to decline if the above trend continues. MIS habitat and populations of elk, deer, and moose will continue to decline with this trend. Early-seral habitats and areas of burned trees with snag habitat are well below natural ranges. (North Fork BHROWS watershed assessment, 1999)

Describe the Proposed Action.

The Black Skull project would reintroduce fire into this fire adapted ecosystem to begin reversing the trends caused from past fire suppression and reduce the risk of large, severe wildfires.

Under this proposal, prescribed fire will be applied to 19 units with a total of 22,312 acres identified as ignition areas within the 69,891 acre project area. (32% of the project area) The purpose of these treatments will be to encourage early seral vegetative growth, reduce hazardous fuel buildup associated with the insect and disease outbreaks, minimize fuel loadings, reduce fuel continuity and reduce the potential for fire to spread onto the Idaho Panhandle National Forest.

Vegetation characteristics, elevation and topographic differences have been used to determine burn area and extent. Burn units were designed to avoid bare rock, designated old growth, soils susceptible to erosion, and riparian areas to the extent possible. However, some of these features occur as inclusions within burn areas. It is not the intent to ignite within these inclusions, but it is likely that fire will creep into them in places, but based on what we have observed it is highly unlikely that total fuel consumption will even come close to being reached. See Design Features below for further explanation on measures that would be implemented to minimize impacts to these areas.

During prescribed fire ignition we use our knowledge of the area, aspect, and current fuel conditions (i.e. moistures, loadings, and continuity) to determine the most appropriate places to start our ignitions. Traditionally we will ignite the ridge tops on the favorable aspects and allow the prescribed fire to back down the ridge lines and into drainages. We do not anticipate more than 40 to 60% of any unit to burn.

It is important to note that our goal is to mimic natural fire, thus creating a mosaic pattern on the landscape. We do this by introducing fire with low to moderate fire intensities into the burn units. If we experience intensities higher than we desire, we stop ignitions immediately.

None of the units will be entirely ignited and none of the units are expected to burn in their entirety. For example, ignitions are not targeting areas of young forest or older forest, nor are these areas expected to burn to any great extent. Table 1 shows the treatment units and the approximate area that is expected to burn within each unit. Table 2 refers to the acres associated with each proposed ignition area. While not every acre will burn, the entire unit will have benefitted from the fire effects as a result of increased vegetative diversity.

The proposal would be accomplished by Forest Service personnel using a series of spring/summer/fall burns (using hand and/or aerial ignition) over a 5-10 year period. Fire would be introduced under predetermined weather conditions to allow mixed severity fire to treat large-scale areas within the project area. Fire would be applied to pre-identified areas; once this fire is established, it would be allowed to move and spread until a significant weather event occurs. It is expected that fire will remain active and continue to burn within the project area for up to a month or more. The creation of openings consistent with what has resulted from past resource benefit fires previously known as Wildland Fire Use (WFO) fires on the North Fork district is anticipated and desired.

Table 1: Probable burn acres within the Black Skull Project

Proposed Burn Unit	Proposed Unit Acres	Proposed Ignition Areas in Acres
1	3349	787
2	2399	910
3	1116	528
4	2223	379
5	3534	1636
6	3956	2098
7	3941	1247
8	2993	1149
9	3731	244
10	2704	1130
11	3927	465
12	4548	987
13	4423	2235
14	6571	2290
15	5994	1480
16	5153	1216
17	3448	1473
18	2972	1062
19	2909	996
Total	69891	22312

Table 2: Proposed ignition units within the Black Skull Project

Proposed	Proposed Ignition
----------	-------------------

Return entries into the units may be necessary to achieve desired conditions and will be evaluated by district personnel

List the Design Criteria / Mitigation Measures * to be included with the Proposed Action.

1. All proposed treatments will implement INFISH buffers. No fire ignition will occur within 300 feet of fish-bearing streams; 150 feet of non-fish bearing perennial streams or 100 feet of non-fish bearing intermittent streams. The Clearwater/ Nez Perce NF programmatic Biological Assessment guidelines for threatened and endangered fish will be used, and no burning will be initiated in riparian areas. However, fire that “backs” into riparian zones will be allowed to burn, since higher fuel moistures in riparian areas typically limits fire impacts/spread in these zones. INFISH buffers will prevent direct sediment input through overland flow. Low to mixed severity burns will result in live tree retention, which will minimize the increase in water yields.
2. Burn boundaries are located outside of old growth habitat. No ignitions will take place in designated old growth stands. Fire may back into and creep around old growth areas, potentially cleaning up jackpots of fuels. Ignition may occur in non-designated mature and old growth forest habitat patches, with the intent to create low to mixed severity burns.
3. Smoke management will be coordinated with the North Idaho and Montana Airshed Groups to ensure compliance with the Clean Air Act.
4. Trailheads and roads within the project area will be posted with informational signs well prior to the planned ignition dates. Local outfitters will be informed by personal contacts. Notice of upcoming burns will be provided on the Forest website and via the local media through news releases.
5. Maintain less than 5% of the streamside RHCA burned at high severity with these patches not highly concentrated.
6. Biological weed control areas will be excluded from ignition areas. Known weed infestations will be avoided where possible. Any burning in these areas is expected to be lower intensity fire that backs into the areas.
7. No direct ignition will take place in E1 management areas. These small areas were included only due to topography along the project boundary.

Small NEPA IDT/resource specialists are listed below. Contact them if you have any questions regarding their resource for your project.

Botany – Mike Hays, mhays01@fs.fed.us; 983-4028

Fisheries – Derrick Bawdon, dbawdon@fs.fed.us; 963-4211

Heritage – Steve Lucas, slucas@fs.fed.us; 983-4040

Hydrology – Cynthia Valle, cvalle@fs.fed.us; 963-4203

Minerals – Marty Jones, martinjones@fs.fed.us; 983-5158

Recreation – Carol Hennessey, cahennessey@fs.fed.us; 935-4270

Soils – Alex Rozin, alexandraroizin@fs.fed.us; 842-2100

Wild and Scenic River – Chris Noyes, chnoyes@fs.fed.us; 935-4251

Wildlife – Jim Lutes, jamesrlutes@fs.fed.us; 963-4202

PROJECT MAPS

Please send – separate from this form and per the instructions outlined below – a GIS-generated map or maps of the project area (pdf format only) with the project submission email.

- Make sure that the map layers can be turned on / off / are editable.
- Make sure the map(s) fits on an 8.5 x 11 sheet of paper.

Provide at least one map, preferably “portrait” orientation, with the project area / features as:

- a Point, e.g. culvert, bridge, etc.,
- a Line, e.g. fence, road, creek, etc., and/or
- a Polygon, e.g. stand boundaries, treatment areas, etc.
 - Do not use a point if treating an area, use a polygon.
 - Points/lines/polygons need to be distinct and easily found on the map.
 - The project area / site needs to be centered on the map, especially if only one area/feature.

Please use the Forest Visitor Map as your map’s base layer.

- Do not add contour lines to the FV map unless needed for clarifying the proposed action. Contour lines can make the map difficult to read.
 - If contour lines are needed, make sure they are distinguishable from other linear features such as roads, trails, streams, etc.
- A topo map can be substituted for the FV map. If using a topo map but the contour lines are not important the topo lines should be light gray or opaque.
- Regardless of base map, make sure there are identifiable elements, e.g. towns, roads, streams, etc. on the map to help locate the project area on the landscape and that the elements are clearly labeled.

The preferred map scale (typically 1:24K) is whatever scale best presents the project area’s location and proposed activities:

- If the 1:24K scale is too small (i.e. the project feature(s) – point/line/polygon – would be hard to find or would be indistinguishable on just one map), use a larger scale to show the overall project area (coarse scale map) and smaller scaled maps to show the project features (fine scale map).
- If the 1:24K scale is too big (i.e. the project feature is a tiny point or thin line lost/hard to find on the larger landscape), use a smaller scale to highlight the feature while ensuring there are elements on the map to identify the project’s location.
- If you need to make additional maps, please make as few as possible.

At a minimum, all maps should include (with the preferred but not set in stone location on the map):

- a Title (project name and district name only (please); centered at top)
- a Legend (features clearly labeled; lower right corner)
- a Scale (in half mile, e.g. 0__0.25__0.5 miles, or full miles, e.g. 0__0.25__0.5__1.0 miles; lower left corner)
- a North Arrow (upper right corner)
 - Display all of the above in boxes with black outlines and a white backgrounds (not gray or yellow)
 - Do not ‘Halo’ the text or numbers or anything else on the map. Please.
 - The Scale needs to be large enough to read the numbers.

Finally, please include the mapmakers name and the date it was created on the map.

The Map(s) you provide will be used for Scoping the Public and the Tribes and in the Decision document. Please make sure they show – clearly, effectively, and professionally – what activity or activities are being proposed and where they are located on the Nez Perce - Clearwater National Forests.

SHAPEFILES

The resource specialists require the shapefile(s) of the project's proposed activities before they will conduct their analyses. Providing the shapefile does not substitute for providing a pdf map.

The Project Proponent needs to send the shapefile, or a location where the shapefile can be found, to the Small NEPA Planner (currently: jjchynoweth@fs.fed.us) by the time or shortly after the District Ranger submits this form.

- Shapefiles need to include the Project Name and have the Feature (culvert, bridge, etc.) labeled.
- Shapefiles need to include the following extensions – .dbf, .prj, .sbn, .shp, .shx, and .xml.

PROPONENT: When submitting the shapefile(s) you must include in the email how the location(s) of the project feature(s), i.e. line, point, and/or polygon, were determined (see below):

- Field-collected GPS data;
- From existing corporate GIS data (provide name of GIS layer);
- Created (digitized) from an aerial photo;
- Created (digitized) from the existing corporate GIS data;
- Created (digitized) from the NPCLW Visitor Map;
- Other (describe).

Projects in Roadless Area

<p>What is the Inventoried Roadless Area name?</p> <p><i>O:\NFS\NezPerceClearwater\Project\MultiBasin\Planning\Small_NEPA_Cat_Ex\Reference Material\Roadless Rule Info</i></p>	<p><u>Forest Plan IRA Name (if different):</u></p> <p><i>Mallard-Larkins</i></p>
<p>Identify the Idaho Roadless Management Classification:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Wild Land Recreation</i> • <i>Special Areas of Historic or Tribal Significance</i> • <i>Primitive</i> • <i>Backcountry Restoration</i> • <i>General Forest, Rangeland and Grassland</i> 	<p>Classification(s):</p> <p>Primitive Wild Land Recreation Backcountry Restoration</p>
<p>Does the project involve constructing or reconstructing roads? Yes* <input checked="" type="radio"/> No</p> <p>* If yes, see http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2011-title36-vol2 then navigate to Subpart C 294.23</p>	
<p>Does the project involve cutting trees? Yes* <input checked="" type="radio"/> No</p> <p>* If yes, see http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2011-title36-vol2 then navigate to Subpart C 294.24</p>	
<p>Does the project involve removing minerals, including common variety minerals? Yes* <input checked="" type="radio"/> No</p> <p>* If yes, see http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CFR-2011-title36-vol2 then navigate to Subpart C 294.25</p>	

JC : 4/1/2019

Additional Information: